

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANTATION AGRICULTURE IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA, 1901-1960

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Abstract: This paper examines the nexus between the development of infrastructure and plantation agriculture in Southwestern Nigeria. It specifically analyses how the British constructed railways and roads in Southwestern Nigeria in particular in order to achieve their colonial economic policy in the country during colonial period. This is in agreement with the views of some African scholars like Toyin Falola, Walter Rodney, Michael Crowther and Julius Ihonvbere, who contend that the British interest in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general was facilitated by economic motives. The development of modern transport and the introduction of British monetary system were some of the major direct and indirect means pursued by the British towards achieving their economic interest in Nigeria. The paper argues that though the railway and road infrastructure constructed by the British positively affected the means of transport system, they were used to tap the resources of Southwestern Nigeria in no small measure during this period. The methodological approach adopted in this paper is historical, thematic and qualitative. Sources of information include primary and secondary materials derived from archives and extant literature.

Keywords: Development; Infrastructure; Plantation Agriculture; Southwestern Nigeria

Introduction

Plantation agriculture otherwise known as commercial agriculture is a labour intensive enterprise which originated from the discovery of the New World (now known as the Americas) in the 15th and 16th centuries.¹ Following the Crusades, the Italian city-states of Genoa and Venice had established plantations in Cyprus for the cultivation of sugar cane for European

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¹Okon O Uya, "African Diaspora and the Black Experience" in *New World Slavery (Revised Edition)*. (Lagos: Third Press Publications, 1992):62.

consumption.² Plantation agriculture was introduced into the Atlantic by the Portuguese on the West African Island of Sao Tome in the 1500s.³ Here, taking advantage of African labour supply from the nearby Congo region, the Portuguese cultivated sugar. While sugar dominated the plantation agriculture in the early years, it was later followed by the cultivation of other crops such as tobacco, rice, cotton and cocoa.⁴

Plantations were introduced into the tropics during the sixteenth century by European colonists as a cheap system of cheaply exploiting the hot humid environment and the native labour as well as slave and indentured or contract labour, for the purpose of producing tropical crops such as sugarcane for export to the temperate countries of Europe in particular.⁵ These plantations which were initially concentrated in South America and the West Indies subsequently spread to Sub-Saharan Africa and other areas of the tropics, with their mode of ownership evolving from paternalist resident planters, through absentee landlords and limited liability companies, to transnational or multinational corporations and national or state enterprises.⁶ Plantation agriculture grew and became significant in Africa following the outcome of the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 which led to the partitioning of Africa by the European colonial powers.⁷ The desire of the European powers to acquire colonies in Africa during this period was largely occasioned by economic motives among which were, the need for raw materials, the need for markets, the need for the investment of surplus capital and so on.⁸ This development led to the growth and development of plantations in Africa. These tropical plantations which attracted foreign investments equally had indigenous participation in no small measure.⁹ While the indigenous participation was

²P H Lamb, "Agricultural Development in Nigeria". *Journal of the Royal African Society* 30, no. 119 (1931):119-127

³See O Aboyade, "Foundations of an African Economy". (New York: Praeger, 1966).

⁴Uya, "African Diaspora and the Black Experience" in *New World Slavery....*62

⁵P P Courtenay, "Plantation Agriculture". (London: Bell & Hyman, 1982), p. 2

⁶Reuben K Udo, "The Human Geography of Tropical Africa". (Ibadan, London and Nairobi: Heinemann, 1982): 2

⁷Walter Rodney, *The colonial economy. The Former British Zones. General History of Africa. VII. Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935*. A. A. Boahen. Ed. (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1985): 332

⁸J Ihonvbere and Toyin Falola, Introduction: Colonialism and Exploitation. *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or Development?* T. Falola. Ed. (New Jersey: Zed Books Limited, 1987):1

⁹See P Hill, *The migrant cocoa farmers of Southern Ghana. A study in rural capitalism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); H I Ajaegbu, *Migrants and the rural economy of Nigeria*. Adepoju, A. Ed. *Internal Migration in Nigeria*. (Ile-Ife: Institute of Population and Manpower Studies, 1976):119-139 and Olutayo C Adesina, *Modern Agriculture in Nigeria. A Historical Exegesis. Benin Journal of Historical Studies* 4, nos.1&2 (2000-2004): 59-80

facilitated by the establishment of agricultural stations and the introduction of improved seed varieties to local farmers who were also persuaded to adopt better cultivation practices by the European colonialists, foreign investments were encouraged through granting concessions to European companies to establish plantations.¹⁰ For example, while the Miller Brothers acquired about 2000 acres in 1907 to establish the first rubber plantation in Sapele area of Southern Nigeria,¹¹ the Lever Brothers, the giant transnational conglomerate in Belgian Congo (now Zaire), in 1911, acquired vast land, portions of which were developed into oil-palm plantations.¹² Aside these two countries, the spread of plantation system was noticeable in other parts of West Africa such as the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Anglophone Cameroon.

The introduction of plantation system of agriculture into Nigeria has had far-reaching consequences upon the economic structure of the country.¹³ Its introduction resulted in the transformation of indigenous economy into a market or capitalist oriented economy. The introduction of new tree crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber and kola (*cola nitida*) and the encouragement given to the traditional crops such as oil palm, rubber and cotton by the British brought changes in agriculture in Nigeria in general and Southwestern Nigeria in particular.¹⁴ Prior to the introduction and incorporation of plantation agriculture in Nigeria, the pre-colonial economy of the people was pre-capitalist, pre-industrial and agrarian. The bulk of production was subsistence and backed up by traditional technology.¹⁵ Thus, with the introduction of the plantation farming system, there was a fundamental shift from subsistence economy to monetised economy.¹⁶ In the pre-capitalist Nigerian societies in general and Southwestern Nigeria in particular, the pre-colonial economy of the people was mainly categorised into three sectors, namely; agricultural sector, industrial sector and commercial sector. Other minor sectors which are not part of this study include banking and finance and transport sector.¹⁷ The indigenous

¹⁰Reuben K Udo, *Sixty Years of Plantation Agriculture in Southern Nigeria, 1902-1962*...357-358

¹¹*Ibid*, 362

¹²G Benneh, *Systems of agriculture in tropical Africa. Economic Geography* 48, no.3 (1972):244-257

¹³S A Agboola, *Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910. Topics on Economic and Social History*. I.A Akinjogbin and S.O Osoba. Eds. (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1980): 128-145.

¹⁴*Ibid*

¹⁵Cornelius O Ayodele, *Topics on Economic History of Nigeria*. (Ondo: Crofes Computers Press and Publishers, 1999): 45.

¹⁶L K Opeke, *Development of cocoa industry in Nigeria. Tropical agriculture* 36, no.1 (1969): 36

¹⁷Olutayo, C Adesina, "Indigenous Participation in the Economy of Western Nigeria, 1900-1971" (PhD Thesis. Department of History. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1993):48

agriculture composed of farming, fishing, forestry and animal husbandry. With respect to farming, the people of Southwestern Nigeria cultivated food crops like yam of various species, cocoyam, fruits and vegetables.¹⁸ Meanwhile, their production was far above subsistence level and the surpluses generated thereby were usually exchanged through trade by barter.¹⁹

The imposition of British colonial rule on Nigeria in the last decade of the 19th century was accompanied by a spate of legislations and introduction of economic instruments designed not only to consolidate British administration but also to control the economic resources of the country.²⁰ The desire to open markets for the products of British industries and to control and monopolise the important raw materials available in Nigeria like palm products such as palm kernel, palm oil, rubber among others, which were priorities on their agenda facilitated the development of modern transportation system.²¹ With respect to agriculture, the colonial agricultural policy of the British placed emphasis on the production of cash crops and undermined the production of food crops; the mainstay of the pre-colonial agricultural economy of the country.

The Evolution of Plantation Agriculture in Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria

Several attempts have been made by scholars such as R.K. Udo, A.L. Mabogunje, S.A. Agboola and M.O. Filani to classify agricultural systems in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general using a number of criteria. Notable among criteria used in classifying agricultural systems in Nigeria were the intensity of land use, commercialisation of produce, specialisation in the productivity of crops or the mobility of either farmers or livestock. Hence, using the above enumerated criteria, Filani classified agricultural systems into two broad categories, namely subsistence agriculture and commercial or plantation agriculture.²² Our major focus here is the plantation agriculture. S.A. Agboola identifies three main types of plantation in Nigeria. They are the peasant small-scale tree-crop holdings, the large scale tree plantations, and the non-tree crop large scale estates.²³ Plantation agriculture has some basic

¹⁸Toyin Falola, A Mahadi, M Uhomobhi, and U Anyanwu, "*History of Nigeria I*. (Ibadan: Longman Publishers Limited, 1989): 63

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰O Omosini, "Background to Forestry Legislation in Lagos Colony and Protectorate, 1897-1902" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* ix, no.3, (December, 1978): 45-90.

²¹B Olaniyan, *Economic History of West Africa*. (Akure: Olaniyan Publishing Company, 1980): 47.

²²M O Filani, *Agriculture and Land Use. A Handbook of Geography Teaching for Schools and Colleges*. F. Adetoye and P.O. Okunrotifa. Eds. (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, Nigeria, 2000): 200

²³S A Agboola, "An Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria". (London: Oxford University Press, 1979):51

features. It is a highly capitalised system of agricultural production under which land, labour and the produce for marketing are organised on lines similar to that of a modern industrial plant.²⁴ First and foremost, plantation agriculture requires a large tract of suitable land measured in hundreds or thousands of acres. Hence, the larger the acreage, the greater the chance of having a viable plantation. Second, it requires a large reservoir of readily accessible labour. This is why plantation system constitutes the chief causes of labour migration in the colonial and post-colonial Southwestern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general. Third, the plantation crops are essentially perennial crops.²⁵ The main export crops grown in Southwestern Nigeria, each of which is a permanent tree crop with a productive life of about forty (40) years include cocoa, rubber, kola, coffee and oil palm.²⁶ The fourth feature of plantation agriculture is its sub-classifications which was identified by Agboola and have been mentioned earlier. First, the peasant small-scale tree crop holdings are owned by individuals. The size of this sub-classification of plantation ranges from about 0.4 to 4 hectares. Both household and hired labours are used in production. The second type is the one which involves large scale tree plantations and are owned by government, companies or corporations and rarely by individuals. Paid labour is used in production, and the processing of products is sometimes attempted. The non-tree crop large scale estates involve the cultivation of crops such as rice, sugar cane and tobacco on annual basis only. Both hired and paid labours are used in this type of plantation.²⁷ In all, these three sub-classifications of plantations can be re-grouped into two, on the basis of ownership, namely plantations owned individually and the ones owned by government, companies or corporations. These two groups of plantations were promoted during the colonial and post-colonial Southwestern Nigeria.

Having discussed the basic concept and features of plantation agriculture, it is imperative to examine the historical evolution of this agricultural system in Southwestern Nigeria. Prior to the formal establishment of the British colonial administration over the whole of Southwestern Nigeria especially in the period between late 19th century and 1900, the people had been involved in the cultivation of some tree crops which were both indigenous and foreign. While indigenous plantation crops included oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), rubber (*funtumia elastic*), kola (*cola acuminata (obi abata)*); the foreign crops included cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*), kola (*cola nitida*) and rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*).²⁸ Oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), rubber (*funtumia elastic*), kola (*cola acuminata (obi abata)*) remained indigenous to the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. The oil palm is so

²⁴Udo, Sixty Years of Plantation Agriculture in Southern Nigeria,...356

²⁵Udo, Sixty Years of Plantation Agriculture in Southern Nigeria, 1902-1962...pp.356-357

²⁶W B Morgan. Agriculture in Southern Nigeria. *Economic Geography* 35 (1959):138-150

²⁷Agboola, *An Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria*...p.51

²⁸Ibid: 99-123

unique that the people refer to it as the “tree of life”.²⁹ Its importance cannot be overemphasised. For instance, while the palm fruit is used for the production of palm oil, palm kernel is used in the production of black soap.³⁰ In fact, palm produce accounted for the largest share of Yoruba goods exported during the era of the “legitimate trade”.³¹ Rubber, like oil palm also grew wildly in the region. Although there had always been abundant supplies of rubber trees and vines in the forest regions of Lagos and Southwestern Nigeria, it was not until the 1880s when the palm oil trade was suffering from depression that attention was turned to it due to its commercial value.³² Before the rapid expansion of the rubber industry began in the latter half of the 19th century, Brazil was the major supplier of the rubber species consumed by the growing industries of Europe. The country was rich in the rubber species known as *hevea brasiliensis* which had yielded excellent latex to meet local as well as international demands.³³ But from 1860s onward, increased attention was turned to other parts of the tropical world to meet rising demands for rubber³⁴ due to the development of automobile industry.³⁵ Madagascar, Mozambique, Angola and the Congo became the first regions of Africa to attract the attention of European merchants. These areas supplied Europe with considerable amounts of wild rubber notably the *landolphia* and *clitandra* species.³⁶ It was, however, not until the late 1870s and 1880s that West Africa got linked up in this feverish international demand for rubber. Sierra Leone exported as much as 500,000 lbs of rubber in 1878. The Gold Coast (now Ghana) came next on the list of the West African countries that exported substantial amounts to Europe. For example, in 1882, Gold Coast recorded an export of 12,000 lbs and by 1890, it had emerged as the third largest producer of rubber in the world.³⁷

It was during this period that Lagos as well as other parts of Southwestern Nigeria like Ibadan, Agbabu and Ode-Ondo attracted attention as potential world suppliers of rubber.³⁸ The rubber economy was first activated in

²⁹Olukoya Ogen, Urhobo Migrants and the Ikale Palm Oil Industry, 1850-1968. *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History*, nos 5&6 June (2003): 3-4

³⁰Ibid

³¹G.B Afolabi, *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis*. (London: University of London Press, 1966): 53

³²O Omosini, Background to Forestry Legislation in Lagos Colony and Protectorate, 1897-1902. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* ix, no.3, (December 1978): 49

³³O Omosini, The Rubber Export Trade in Ibadan, 1893-1904: Colonial Innovation or Rubber Economy. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* x, no.3 (December, 1979):23

³⁴LK Opeke, *Tropical Commodity Tree Crops*. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003): 323

³⁵Omosini, O. 1979. The Rubber Export Trade in Ibadan, 1893-1904....24

³⁶P Schidrowitz and T R Dawson, "History of the Rubber Industry". (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952)

³⁷C Cuthbert, "African Rubber Industry". (London, 1911):1

³⁸Agboola, S.A. 1979. "An Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria"...111

Nigeria in 1894 when Governor of Lagos Colony asked a group of Ghanaians to introduce methods of exploiting wild indigenous rubber plants (*funtumia elastica*). Within a period of one year, exports rose to over 2.3 million k.g.³⁹ Before this time, rubber was not exported from Lagos in commercial quantities. From 1885 to 1891 and 1893, yearly exports as recorded in the Blue Books cited by Omosini were 534, 112, 92,567, 502,119 and 104 pounds respectively.⁴⁰ Thus, from 1894, following the intervention of the British government, the export of rubber increased. The following figures indicated the rise especially between 1894 and 1899: 5,867; 5,069,567; 6,484,365; 4,458,327; 3,778,266; and 1,993,525.⁴¹ As time went on, especially when the wild rubber trees were quickly killed due to destructive tapping, higher quality rubber trees "*bevea brasiliensis*" were introduced in 1895. The cultivation of this type of rubber specie was first developed in Sapele.⁴² With the introduction of this new rubber species in 1895 rubber export in Nigeria began to increase tremendously.⁴³

Kola was another plantation crop well grown in Southwestern Nigeria. There are two main types of kola being produced in the region. They were *cola acuminata* and *cola nitida* (Gbanja).⁴⁴ *Cola acuminata* was considered indigenous to the people and was widely grown since the early times.⁴⁵ This tree crop was known to have played an important part in the social gift-exchange of the people in the region. For instance, this kola generally flourished in Ode-Ondo as the kola of commerce because its production in large quantities helped to facilitate inter-group relations between the people and Hausa traders, who had established trade relations with Ondo people before the first decade of the 20th century.⁴⁶ The second type of kola (*cola nitida*) flourished during the colonial period and is still flourishing in Southwestern Nigeria. *Cola nitida* was first cultivated in Otta and Abeokuta areas of Southwestern Nigeria by 1854.⁴⁷ The cultivation of this tree crop in Southwestern Nigeria was said to have been firmly established before 1850s. One argument for the origin of this tree crop suggested that its origin was traced to Sierra Leone which was considered as

³⁹ Omosini, Background to Forestry Legislation in Lagos Colony and Protectorate, 1897-1902....49

⁴⁰ Lagos Blue Book, 1885-1891 cited by Omosini, Background to Forestry Legislation in Lagos Colony and Protectorate, 1897-1902... .50

⁴¹ Agboola, *An Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria*....111

⁴² Omosini, Background to Forestry Legislation in Lagos Colony and Protectorate, 1897-1902....49

⁴³ A E Afigbo, *Raph Moor and the Economic Development of Southern Nigeria, 1896-1903. Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* .5, no.3 (1970):387-391

⁴⁴ Agboola, *Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*.... .137

⁴⁵ Gbade Ikuejube, "Issues in the Contemporary History of Ondo Kingdom". Ondo: Novec'kol Publisher and Printer, 2004):53

⁴⁶ Ibid 53-61

⁴⁷ Agboola, *Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*....137

one of the homes of the crop in West Africa. Many repatriates (ex-slaves) who returned from Sierra Leone to Southwestern Nigeria took some seeds of the crop with them.⁴⁸ The other argument posited that its origin could be traced to the Gold Coast where private individuals who migrated to the place but later returned to Nigeria might have come with some of the seeds.⁴⁹ In addition, northern Yoruba traders who were in contact with their Hausa counterparts by the early years of the 19th century or even earlier could have learnt about the profitability of the kola trade between the Hausa states and the Asante of the Gold Coast.⁵⁰ Whatever may be the conflicting opinions as regard the origin of *cola nitida* in Southwestern Nigeria, the fact remains that it was first cultivated in Otta area of Southwestern Nigeria around 1850s.⁵¹

Cocoa was the first crop in Southwestern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general to be grown on a plantation system.⁵² This crop which later dominated the agricultural economy of Southwestern Nigeria both during the colonial and post-colonial periods was initially introduced into the eastern states of Bonny and Onitsha in the late 19th century⁵³ from Fernando Po by Chief Squiss Benego who established a plantation in the vicinity of Bonny.⁵⁴ In another version given by Allan McPhee, it was stated that a native chief known as David Henshaw introduced cocoa seeds from Fernando Po in 1880 and established a plantation near Calabar.⁵⁵ Agboola argues that this early attempt was said to have failed due to unfavourable ecological conditions in the eastern states and thus, the crop could not thrive well there.⁵⁶ He further remarks that it was not clear whether it was from these two initial centres or Akropong in the then Gold Coast that the first cocoa seeds reached the present day Southwestern Nigeria.⁵⁷ Ekundare observes that one major development that necessitated the success and spread of the cocoa plantation in the Southwestern Nigeria was through the Agege plantation which was regarded as the nursery bed of cocoa cultivation.⁵⁸ No doubt, there were two major factors which were

⁴⁸R Galleti, K D S Baldwin, and I O Dina, *Nigerian Cocoa Farmers*. (London Oxford University Press, 1956): 118-119

⁴⁹Agboola, *Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*...112

⁵⁰S Ibi-Ajayi, *The Economy of Ondo Kingdom in Historical Perspective: 500 years of History. The Evolution of Ondo Kingdom, over 500 years (1510-2010)*. Ibi-Ajayi, S. Ed. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2013):106

⁵¹J B Webster, *Agege Plantations and the African Churches. Conference Proceedings*. (Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1962): 6

⁵²Galleti, Baldwin, and Dina, *Nigerian Cocoa Farmers*... 1

⁵³Agboola, *Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*....112

⁵⁴E K Faluyi, *A history of agriculture in Western Nigeria, 1900-1960*. (PhD. Thesis. Dept. of History. University of Lagos, 1994):13

⁵⁵A McPhee, *Economic revolution in British West Africa*. (London: Routledge, 1926):189

⁵⁶Agboola, *Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*....137

⁵⁷Ibid

⁵⁸R O Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960*. (Methuen, 1973): 167

said to have facilitated the development of cocoa plantation in Southwestern Nigeria. They were the establishment of the Ebute- Metta Botanical Garden, Lagos in 1887 by the government of Lagos Colony; and the growing interest of the merchants' class, professionals, clergy and other educated groups.⁵⁹

The government set up the Botanical Garden under a curator to breed specimens of indigenous plants and trees that were of commercial value.⁶⁰ It was this garden at Ebute-Metta that later facilitated the distribution of cocoa seeds to adjacent districts.⁶¹ In 1887 for instance, cocoa was sent to Ibadan from the Botanical Garden for trial planting.⁶² Its rapid spread in Southwestern Nigeria could also be attributed to the interest of the clergy of the newly formed African Church, Lagos.⁶³ The activities of the clergy of the African Church favoured the spread of cocoa cultivation in some areas in Southwestern Nigeria. In Egba, Egbado and Ijebu areas for instance, cocoa was introduced by different personalities who were members of the African Church. For example, in Ilaro, Rev J.A Olanle was said to have introduced cocoa to the area in 1890s.⁶⁴ In Ondo area, Ilesa and Ekiti, the spread of cocoa was largely through the effort of Rev Charles Philips. He introduced cocoa to Ilesa in 1890 when he sent a pod to one daddy Agbemi of Wasimi Ikaro Ilesa through one Akano of Ile-Agbo who in turn gave the pod to one George Thompson who first raised cocoa seedlings in Ilesa.⁶⁵ In Ondo area, the success and spread of cocoa cultivation was due to several attempts. The first major attempt was through the effort of Rev Charles Philips, a Yoruba clergyman who later became an Anglican Bishop. He was said to have probably brought cocoa seed to Ondo area in the early 1890s. He advised Christian converts there to plant cocoa and coffee in an Ondo village called Ajebandele.⁶⁶ This initial attempt failed because of many reasons. First, Philips cocoa plantings were purely experimental; he was not a full time farmer and never attempted to grow cocoa commercially. Second, his efforts at persuading the Ondo farmers then to plant cocoa themselves were to no avail. The people refused to listen to him and remained skeptical of the merits of the new crop.⁶⁷ These reasons made the crop not to

⁵⁹J A Ayorinde, Historical Notes on the Introduction and Development of the Cocoa Industry in Western Nigeria. *Nigeria Agricultural Journal* 3, no.1, (1966):13

⁶⁰Agboola, Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910....135

⁶¹Faluyi, A History of Agriculture in Western Nigeria, 1900-1960....146

⁶²Agboola, Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910....135

⁶³Galleti, Baldwin, and Dina, *Nigerian Cocoa Farmers*....234

⁶⁴A H Melbourne, The Palm kernel Industry. *Journal of Royal African Society* 15 (1915):135-136

⁶⁵Berry, S.S.1968. Christianity and the rise of Cocoa-growing in Ibadan and Ondo. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4. no.3 (1968): 443

⁶⁶Ibid

⁶⁷Ibi-Ajayi, The Economy of Ondo Kingdom in Historical Perspective: 500 years of History....107

be firmly established in Ondo area during this first attempt. The second attempt at introducing and spreading cocoa cultivation in Ondo area was attributed to the return of Agege plantation workers and labourers at a village called “Okeigbo” in Ondo Division.⁶⁸ The citizens of this area who were said to have left their village in search of employment and enlightenment later sought for jobs as labourers on road construction projects around Lagos and as well worked at Agege plantations. After a year or two, they returned to Okeigbo and began their own cocoa farms.⁶⁹ Thus, directly and indirectly, the experience of these men who had gone to work at Agege contributed to the initial development of cocoa growing in quite few villages in Ondo area.⁷⁰ In fact, by early 20th century, most Okeigbo farmers had accepted the new crop and many had begun to plant it.⁷¹

Infrastructural Development and Plantation Agriculture in Southwestern Nigeria

Infrastructure is a multidimensional concept viewed by scholars from different perspectives. For instance, Ogbuozobe refers to infrastructure as a network of transport, communication and public (social) services-all functioning as a system or as a set of interrelated and mutually beneficial services provided for the improvement of general well-being of the population.⁷² According to Olukoju, infrastructure can be defined as “the basic structures and facilities necessary for a country or an organisation to function effectively, such as buildings, transport, water and energy resources and administrative system.”⁷³ Generally, infrastructure can be classified into two groups of services, namely economic infrastructure and social infrastructure. While social infrastructure embraces health, education and water supply, economic infrastructure includes transportation (roads and railways) and communication.⁷⁴ From these two main classifications of infrastructure, the study is restricted to economic infrastructure (with major emphasis on rail and road transportation).

⁶⁸Agboola, Agricultural changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910....135

⁶⁹Ayorinde, Historical notes on the introduction and development of cocoa industry in Western Nigeria....18-23

⁷⁰Berry, S.S.1968. Christianity and the rise of Cocoa-growing in Ibadan and Ondo...443

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²O Ogbuozobe, *Infrastructural Development in Nigeria* in 2010. (Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1997): 163-193.

⁷³Ayodeji Olukoju, *Infrastructure Development and Urban facilities in Lagos, 1861-2000*. (Ibadan: IFRA, 2003):1

⁷⁴Samson Adesola Adesote, *Plantation Agriculture and the Growth of Migrant Settlements in Ondo Division, Southwestern Nigeria, 1947-1986*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of History, University of Ibadan, 2016):82

Prior to the development of modern transport system, traditional means of transportation such as human portorage and water transportation were the major means of transportation in the Southwestern Nigeria in particular. As argued by Olubomehin, this traditional transport system could not cope with the demand of the colonial economy. He further explains that the British realised that in order to achieve their economic objective, the transportation system in the country had to be improved.⁷⁵ The development of plantation agriculture in the colonial Southwestern Nigeria was facilitated through infrastructural development by the British during this period of study. As observed by Oluwasanmi, the expansion in the production of agricultural materials for the export market was facilitated by the building of a modern transport system.⁷⁶ The history of transport development in Nigeria during this period of study centred on the development of the inland waterways, railways and roads.⁷⁷ Of these means of transportation, our focus here is the development of railway and road transport. Fundamentally, two main reasons facilitated the early development of transportation system in Nigeria, in general, and Southwestern Nigeria, in particular during this period. First, the need to establish effective territorial administrative machinery. The colonial government held the view that in a vast territory like Nigeria without adequate transport facilities easy movement in the territory would be difficult. Second, the vast interior of the country could not be fully exploited without putting in place efficient system of transportation.⁷⁸

a. Development of Railway System and Plantation Agriculture in Southwestern Nigeria

Railway system was the first major economic infrastructure developed by the British colonialist. Following the establishment and consolidation of British administrative control in Nigeria, the British began to embark on the construction of the railway system. Although the official history of the Nigerian Railway was concentrated on the period after 1901 when the Iddo-Ibadan line was opened and when Railway policy was adopted, efforts to construct them began in the late 19th century.⁷⁹ The railway received the most important and

⁷⁵Oladipo O. Olubomehin, "Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western Nigeria, 1920 to 1952", *African Journal of History and Culture* 4, no.3 (2012): 38

⁷⁶H A Oluwasanmi, *Agriculture and Nigerian Economic Development*. (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1966):13

⁷⁷S A Olanrewaju, *The Infrastructure on Exploitation. Transport Monetary changes Banking. Britain and Nigeria. Exploitation or Development*. T. Falola (ed). (New Jersey. Zed Books Limited, 1987): 66-67

⁷⁸Oluwasanmi, *Agriculture and Nigerian Economic Development....13*

⁷⁹O Omosini, *The Background to Railway Policy in Nigeria. Topic on Nigerian Economic and Social*

History. I. A. Akinjogbin and S. O. Osoba. Eds. (Ile-Ife University Press, 1980):10.

urgent consideration. The demand for railway to link Lagos with the hinterland antedated the imposition of colonial rule.⁸⁰ As early as 1875, a European traveller, John Whitford had suggested the construction of a line from Lagos to Lokoja, romanticising the political economic and religious advantages derivable from it. Similar calls were also made by many other European and Africans. Despite all these calls, nothing was done before the 1890s.⁸¹ By 1895, there was no need to put further pressure on the British government. She had come to realise that it was a *sine qua non* for its economic policy in Africa in general.⁸² In that year, there was a change of government, which led to the emergence of Joseph Chamberlain as the Colonial Secretary. Chamberlain, the Birmingham radical and social reformer was a strong believer of the theory of developing the “neglected estates” of the British Empire.⁸³ Chamberlain, a one-time railway projector for China, the Turkish Empire and East Africa had strongly believed that:

without the railway, no progress would be possible and that vast territory recently acquired by the United Kingdom would remain an ‘undeveloped estate’ for an indefinite period.⁸⁴

Shortly after assuming office another deputation of British West African merchants, bankers and ship-owners accompanied by several members of parliament met the Colonial Secretary and renewed their demand that further action should be taken on the railways project to prevent before British trade being diverted to other routes.⁸⁵ Thus, he seized the occasion of the deputation to espouse his doctrine of developing the neglected estates of the Empire through railway construction and judicious investment of British capital.⁸⁶ Within a month after the deputation went to the Colonial Secretary, an important policy decision on the Lagos and other British West African railways was taken. First, there was a laid down policy that the colonial governments, and not private investors, should construct railways in the colonies. The administrators in the British colonies shared Chamberlain’s view. Thus, an approval was then given for work to begin on the first section of the railway from Lagos to Otta. In spite of the early approval, actual construction did not

⁸⁰Falola Falola, *The political economy of pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900*. (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1984): 167

⁸¹See Oladipo O Olubomohin, *Road transportation in Western Nigeria, 1900 –1960: Its role, Nature and Impact*. (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2001)

⁸²Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State*.... 167

⁸³Omosini, *The Background to Railway Policy in Nigeria*.....156

⁸⁴J L Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlin*. (London, 1961): 395

⁸⁵See *The West African Railways* (Pamphlet), 1895 cited by Omosini, *The Background to Railway Policy in Nigeria*...156-157

⁸⁶*Ibid*

commence until March 1896.⁸⁷ It was designed as an arrow standard colonial gauge of 3'6⁸⁸, which was to pass through the region where cash crops were available for quick transportation to Lagos.⁸⁹ The approved line from Iddo to Ibadan was not completed until the end of 1900. This completed railway line was formally opened on March 4, 1901⁹⁰. It was later extended to Osogbo by 1907.⁹¹ Not only did the construction of the railway make the transportation of agricultural produce such as cocoa, cotton and palm produce easier and quicker in Southwestern Nigeria in particular, it also aided its spread, most especially, cocoa, into the interior.⁹² In addition, the construction of the railway and the expansion of production northwards led to the establishment of cotton ginneries at Abeokuta, Eruwa, Ibadan, Iwo and Osogbo.⁹³ In fact, the more enthusiastic acceptance of cocoa at Ibadan since 1901 than in Ondo could also be traced to the easier transportation through the railway from Ibadan.⁹⁴ However, railway was inadequate for the economic needs of the region. The railway network tapped comparatively small areas in the vast territory. Roads were required to carry the agricultural produce from areas not reached by railways to the coast and consuming areas.⁹⁵

b. Development of Road Infrastructure and Plantation Agriculture in Southwestern Nigeria

Road infrastructure constituted another infrastructure that contributed to the development of plantation agriculture, particularly cocoa industry in Southwestern Nigeria. The advent of motor transport created a greater economic revolution than that of the railroads because motor vehicle as a means of conveyance have a range which far exceeds that commanded by the railways.⁹⁶ The colonial government designed the building of trunk roads to run horizontally across the country so as to link the regional capitals to facilitate the movement of commodities.⁹⁷ The first motorable road in Nigeria was built in 1906 from Ibadan to Oyo and it was linked to the railways by a railway-

⁸⁷See J O Oyemakinde, *A History of Indigenous Labour on the Nigerian Railway, 1885-1945*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1970).

⁸⁸Omosini, *The Background to Railway Policy in Nigeria*.....157

⁸⁹Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State*... 167

⁹⁰Olaniyan, *Economic History of West Africa*...86

⁹¹Agboola, *Agricultural Changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*.... 142

⁹²Oladipo O. Olubomehin, "Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western Nigeria, 1920 to 1952", *African Journal of History and Culture* 4, no.3 (2012): 38-40.

⁹³W N M Geary, *Nigeria under British rule*. (London, 1965).12

⁹⁴Agboola, *Agricultural Changes in Western Nigeria, 1850-1910*...142

⁹⁵Oluwasanmi, *Agriculture and Nigerian Economic Development*....15

⁹⁶Olaniyan, *Economic History in West Africa*.... 86

⁹⁷Olubomehin, O.O. 2012. Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western.... 39

operated road transport service.⁹⁸ This was followed by similar services from Osogbo to Ife, Ilesa, Ogbomosho, and from Ede to Iwo.⁹⁹

Before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, over 2000 miles of roads had been built.¹⁰⁰ Although the construction of roads was interrupted by the First World War, it resumed from 1922.¹⁰¹ In Southwestern Nigeria for example, roads were constructed between Ibadan and Lagos; Ibadan and Ijebu-Ode; Ilesa and Akure to Ondo among others.¹⁰² For example, in Ondo Province, including Ondo Division, motor transport service was provided by the government and private individuals. The construction of road from Osogbo to Ondo Division, made it possible to transport large quantities of agricultural produce “from Ondo and Okeigbo to Osogbo.”¹⁰³ Also, in 1924, according to the District Officer’s report, “the transport difficulty, which was a major problem in Ondo had to a reasonable extent been overcome through the utilisation of lorries, which helped in conveying cocoa as well as other produce for sale at Ilesha”.¹⁰⁴ While Olaniyan argues that by 1926, the construction and maintenance of roads were the joint responsibility of the Native Administrations and the Public Works Department¹⁰⁵, Olubomehin posits that with respect to Western Nigeria, road development in the region from the 1920 involved the government, the people and the missionaries.¹⁰⁶

Initially, roads were constructed to feed the railways. The Nigerian railway played a substantial role in early development of road network in Nigeria. Therefore, such roads served as a means of extending railway influence to places far removed from the railway lines¹⁰⁷ like Ondo area. This enabled the European business community in Nigeria to expand its sphere of influence to places, which hitherto could not have been reached by either water or the railways. This was why majority of the roads constructed were of poor quality. They, nevertheless, served the purpose of their construction.¹⁰⁸ According to Robinson and others cited by Oluwasanmi, out of a total of 12, 147kms of road constructed in the Western Nigeria between 1906 and 1960, only a 17.65

⁹⁸Olaniyan, *Economic History in West Africa*.... 87

⁹⁹Ibid

¹⁰⁰Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria*....14

¹⁰¹Olubomehin, Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western....39

¹⁰²See Olubomehin, O.O. 2011. *Road transportation in Western Nigeria, 1900–1960*....

¹⁰³ N.A.I: CSO 26/11874 Ondo Province, Annual Report, 1924, para. 129

¹⁰⁴ N.A.I: CSO 26/11874 Ondo Province, Annual Report, 1924, para. 129

¹⁰⁵Olaniyan, *Economic History in West Africa*....87

¹⁰⁶ Olubomehin, O.O. 2012. Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western Nigeria....39

¹⁰⁷Falola, *The Political Economy of Pre-Colonial African State*....167

¹⁰⁸Olutayo C Adesina, A Historical Evaluation on the Western Nigerian Government Agricultural Policy, 1951-1966. (Unpublished M.A Dissertation, Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1989): 21

percent was tarred.¹⁰⁹ The table below shows the statistical data of the total kilometres of roads constructed and tarred in Nigeria between 1906 and 1960.

Table 1: Tarred Roads in Nigeria between 1906 and 1960.

S/N	Region	Total Road Length (kms)	Tarred Road (kms)	Percentage of Tarred total road length
1.	West	12,147	2,144	17.65
2.	East	14,026	1,060	7.58
3.	North	20,000	1,800	9.00
	TOTAL	46,173	5,004	10.84

Source: Robinson, H et al, *The Economic Coordination of Transport Development in Nigeria*. California: Standard Research Institute, 1960):137, cited by Oluwasanmi, Oluwasanmi, *Agriculture and Nigerian Economic Development*....21.

The above table shows the total kilometres of roads tarred by the British colonial administration between 1906 and 1960 in the three major regions of Nigeria. Out of 46, 173 kilometres of roads estimated for the whole of Nigeria, only 5,004 kilometres were tarred.

Conclusion

The foregoing discourse has examined the historical trajectory of the development of railway and road infrastructure vis-à-vis the development of plantation agriculture in colonial Southwestern Nigeria. It argues that in order to promote the development of plantation agriculture for the purpose of meeting the needs of the metropolis, the British colonial authorities designed a number of measures among which was the development of infrastructure. This measure transformed subsistence production and integrated it into a global free market economy. This was why Olarewaju argues that the construction of road as an instrument of exploitation was also not intended by the colonial administrators to serve the development needs of the Nigerian peoples, but, rather the British economic interest.¹¹⁰ Without doubt, the development of both railway and road transportation served as indispensable tools in the pursuit of the British economic goals in Southwestern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general during this period. However, the introduction of these modern means of transportation by the British colonial administration brought about socio-economic changes such as increase in agricultural production, provision of employment opportunities for the people, increase in commercial and trading activities and promotion of urbanisation.

¹⁰⁹ Olarewaju, The Infrastructure on Exploitation. Transport Monetary changes....71

¹¹⁰ Ibid